



02 June 2022

Deputy Peadar Tóibín TD
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Our Ref: HM/Communications

PQ23297/22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of smear tests carried out by CervicalCheck in each of the last ten years and to date in 2022.

PQ23466/22: To ask the Minister for Health the number of CervicalCheck slides and samples that were sent to laboratories abroad in each of the past ten years and to date in 2022.

Dear Deputy,

I refer to the two Parliamentary Questions above, which I intend to answer as one. I trust you are agreeable with this approach.

CervicalCheck: total number of people screened

CervicalCheck plays an important role in preventing cervical cancer in Ireland. Since the programme started in 2008, the number of women who developed cervical cancer decreased by 7% year-on-year from 2010-2015. More recent data shows that the decreasing incidence has been sustained even as the programme matures, with a 2.8% annual percentage decrease from 2010-2018.

However, there are limitations to screening, in that it will not lead to the detection of all cases of cervical cancer. Screening will not find every abnormal cell change. This is a limitation of all cancer screening programmes, not just in Ireland, but globally. Every cervical cancer screening programme will have cases of interval cancer, (i.e. people who are diagnosed with cancer after a previous negative screening test and before their next screening test is due).

The total number of persons screened by CervicalCheck - at either primary care or colposcopy - in each of the past ten years is shown in the following table. Verified data for 2022 is not yet available. Please note that in March 2020 cervical screening in Ireland changed from cytology screening (smear test) to HPV cervical screening. The figures in this table are therefore not the number of smear tests but the total number of persons screened (either cytology-led or HPV-led screening) in this time period.

Year	No. of persons screened
2011	296,479
2012	324,810
2013	344,500
2014	289,170
2015	272,471
2016	276,450
2017	279,893
2018	355,745*
2019	229,176
2020	168,792

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2021	333,437
2022†	76,225

*Year women availed of the offer of a free out-of-schedule screening test
† Verified data for January to March 2022

The CervicalCheck programme was paused during April, May and June 2020 on public health advice because of the situation with COVID-19. Despite the many restrictions the pandemic placed on our operations, the programme is now up to date with invites for screening.

CervicalCheck: laboratory usage

The following table shows the number of samples CervicalCheck has sent to laboratory partners abroad for testing in each of the past ten years, up until the end of 2021. Verified data for 2022 is only available for January to March. This number has increased in recent years as some private laboratory providers have ceased processing samples.

Year	No. of tests sent to lab outside Ireland
2011	254,190
2012	276,624
2013	282,956
2014	231,912
2015	221,249
2016	224,865
2017	230,307
2018	302,921
2019	188,828
2020	135,291
2021	286,502
2022†	76,252

† Verified data for January to March 2022

All cervical screening samples go to a quality-assured laboratory provider. The quality assurance requirements and standards for the cervical screening programme are based on European guidance, as set out in the *European guidelines for quality assurance in cervical cancer screening*, and our *Standards for Quality Assurance in Cervical Screening*.

Two quality-assured laboratories process all CervicalCheck tests. They are Quest Diagnostics in the USA, and the Coombe Women and Infants University Hospital (CWIUH) in Dublin. They perform HPV primary testing and reflex cytology. We use a laboratory provider in the US because there are not enough quality-assured labs available in Ireland to meet our needs, and to ensure resilience in our system.

Clarification

Please note the two tables are reporting slightly different figures, as per the Parliamentary Questions. Table 1 (No. of persons screened) is the number of unique women per year and Table 2 (No. of tests sent to lab outside Ireland) is the total number of tests processed abroad (some screening participants will have more than one test taken in a calendar year).



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Table 2 (No. of tests sent to lab outside Ireland) contains updated figures compared to those previously supplied to you. This is due to use of a different (more accurate) reporting method.

Media guide

As part of our work to promote a better understanding of the services we provide, we are making accurate information available to assist those writing and talking about our service and related issues. To assist in that purpose we have produced A Guide to Talking About Cervical Screening in Ireland, which you are welcome to access [here](#).

For other queries, programme participants can call the Freephone information line on 1800 45 45 55; email: info@screeningservice.ie; or contact their clinic directly.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Murphy,
Chief Executive.

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